

Union Square Civic Advisory Committee
Meeting Notes 3/18/14

Master Developer Presentations

I. Introduction

Wig Zamore, chairman of the CAC, welcomes and opens the discussion for public comment.

II. Public Comment Period

III. Meeting Format

Edward O'Donnell, Director of Economic Development, thanks CAC members and residents who have attended the meetings. This is the last of three sets of developer presentations. The last three teams will have 25 minutes to present, followed by Q&A. All presentations will then be posted on the City's website.

IV. Presentation by Samuels & Associates

- Approach heavily influenced by roots in retail, grocery centers; concerned with experience at the ground level and the streetscapes
- Approach for USQ: Master plan in accordance with the 1) neighborhood vision; 2) blending with existing neighborhood; 3) land assembly; 4) seeding the neighborhood with restaurants, neighborhood services; and 5) building and delivering the vision.
- Grove Hall development in Boston: pretty tough neighborhood; team worked with neighborhood groups in order to build a much needed retail center, grocery store. Helped provide the neighborhood with a sense of place.
- Barry's Corner in Allston – project just broke ground
- Faces of Fenway video
- Fenway 1998 vs. Today:
 - Previously dominated by parking lots, auto uses, very similar conditions to Union Square. Spent four years working with the neighborhood on the vision, rezoning and master planning. Pedestrian paths were critical to project; included bicycle paths and created new retail storefronts. Goal was to create an “urban village”.
 - The Trilogy was the first mixed-use building (housing, retail) component – successful.
 - Built a community health center
 - Renovated old warehouse buildings; integrate old and new buildings
 - Promote alternative modes of transportation, including ZipCar, bicycle lanes
- Landmark Center: created new vision for an iconic building. Purchased a few years ago from Abbey Group. Goal is to celebrate the history of the building; anchored by Wegman's
- Vision for USQ (per Arrowstreet)
 - Important to understand the extent of USQ; much larger than 12 acres
 - Create active public spaces
 - Worked with BioMed to renovate several derelict buildings into innovative spaces (ex/ 450 Kendall Street); hope to do similar renovations in USQ
 - Designed and opened Wonderland Station (MBTA) – created as a plaza for people with transit access—could do something similar in USQ

- Q&A:
 - Greatest challenge? Land assemblage—but they have experience doing this in Fenway
 - Greatest weakness: Not the largest of the 9 teams; smaller company but it allows the partners to be more personally involved
 - Involvement in Ames? When the Ames Envelope Company closed, Arrowstreet came in to revision the building and create spaces for creative uses; Arrowstreet also designed Brooklyn Boulders
 - Grove Hall experience: worked with the Grove Hall CDC and created local hiring and other community commitments; they own the property but still very actively engaged

V. Presentation by The Abbey Group

- Virtually all of their development projects have been rooted in urban environments with historical backgrounds. They look at the area's past to inform its future.
- Values: community-inspired; personally invest in projects; long-term interaction w/ community
- Challenge for USQ: get the city and neighborhood visions right; integrate the big picture goals but find creative solutions to integrate new and old; create compelling work environment to attract businesses
- Proposition: embrace existing neighborhood; cultivate an ecodistrict; nurture arts district; build for and invest for the creative economy
- Two projects unique to this experience:
 - The Fenway: Landmark Center—took over in 1996; worked with the Fenway neighborhood groups to create pedestrian, retail, interconnected experience. This included 1.5 M sq. ft. of historical development. Created the first new apartment building in the neighborhood in over 20 years (Landmark Square). Projects required significant transportation analysis, including changing poor road patterns, signaling and new pedestrian crossings. The Viridian included affordable housing and ground floor community center.
 - Downtown Crossing: 45 Province Street – a modern beauty in historic downtown; created using contextual, forward-thinking design. Helped to establish a residential environment. Didn't back down in spite of recession.
- Envision the future of USQ as follows:
 - Protect it, but add ecodistrict (using a systems approach to sustainability; using density and critical mass to advantage) and adding arts district (public art, new restaurants, innovative spaces, second floor art and retail zone)
- Q&A:
 - Biggest challenge: Lots of interested stakeholders in USQ, will really need to listen.
 - Weakness: Less familiar with Somerville than other teams.
 - How did they make The Viridian more affordable? Utilized large windows to make great, open feeling windows that were smaller, more affordable. 12% of units were affordable.

VI. Presentation by Fallon

- Team has read through SomerVision a few times; they have similar ideas regarding the total package for whole area, including Boynton Yards
- Why they like USQ: local, diversity, irregular streets, grittiness and funkiness, blend of old and young, independent, eclectic, great existing architecture

- Project is about infill as much as anything else; making connections between corridors and squares using development that fits within the appropriate scale
- Opportunity: Build on existing attributes; create spaces that have long-term impact
 - Connect parcels and create commercial district using a “smart” footprint
 - Want to make USQ a destination; important to integrate cultural events
 - Commitment to shaping the neighborhood around existing residential/retail base
 - Need greater rationale for business, commercial uses to come to USQ. Important to attract innovation, creative economy and startups. Fallon has experience doing this in Fan Pier, especially with Mass Challenge.
 - Open space is also critical for attracting entrepreneurs
- Interested in protecting existing character but bringing the jobs that will support amenities
- Many mix of uses but several missing links; empty and underutilized space
- Aspire to highest level of sustainability; plan for change/flexibility
- Leverage funky environments that brims with innovation; fill holes but respect history
- Why Fallon? There’s a lot to do, large and small scale, they have proven ability to serve as the catalyst for economic development
- USQ video
- Q&A:
 - Biggest challenge: make sure that everyone is committed to moving projects along
 - Weakness: None.
 - USQ vs. Fan Pier approach: Important to keep businesses that are here in USQ—they’re critical to the fabric of the square. Fan Pier was open, parking lots when development began. USQ has a scale already; this project is more about infill development.
 - What percentage of projects are completed on time and on budget? Fallon finances projects themselves so he ensures projects are all completed on time and on (or under) budget.
 - Biggest obstacle to development? Spending the time up front to get the planning right; getting the right contractors on board.

VII. Public Q&A

- Q for the Abbey Group: How did you create pedestrian access at the Fenway? Very difficult to navigate currently. Abbey Group: infrastructure isn’t perfect but the pedestrian access has come a long way since Landmark Center purchase; still evolving.
- How to handle an urban watershed?
 - Abbey Group: In Fenway, they put in flood controls in the buildings
 - Fallon: Study this up front; common problem for this region. Not a major issue.
- How to handle the parking crisis in USQ?
 - Fallon: Need to accommodate business needs, but recognize that Millennials, which are a growing segment of the market, are more likely to use MBTA, bicycles, give up cars.
 - Abbey Group: On Block D-2, there needs to be parking contained within the site. Perhaps consolidate parking when it comes to other parcels in the later stages of development.

VIII. Closing Remarks

- CAC Chairman Wig Zamore thanks developers.

- Next week there will be an infrastructure planning meeting with Team Better Block. Tuesday, March 25th 6-8 PM. More information to follow.
 - Two weeks from today, CAC will meet to begin discussion of proposals, evaluations.
 - All PPT presentations will be made available online:
<http://www.somervillema.gov/departments/ospcd/economic-development/union-square-redevelopment>
- Edward O'Donnell, Director of Economic Development
 - Now comes the hard part: CAC will meet 4/2 and 4/8 to begin evaluations.
 - We will continue to run process as openly as possible.
 - Presentations to the SRA added another set of eyes.
 - How the CAC chooses to evaluate presentation will be up to them.
 - Thanks developers, residents, and members of the CAC.